

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF EDUCATING THE 'SPECIAL' IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Rune Sarromaa Hausstätter
Steven Connolley
Lillehammer University College

This article addresses the debate between traditionalism and inclusion within special education, and presents the argument that being disabled and having special needs are very real conditions, even though disabilities are socially constructed, and that teachers must respond to this reality. This article first presents a theoretical framework that provides an understanding of the processes that create the special student in special education. This article claims that this process is part of the technology of normalization, which plays an important role within special education. Secondly, we show how this understanding can be helpful for identifying the appropriate means of educating and supporting the 'special' student. By emphasizing the link to the practical field of special education, we can better see how we construct the 'special' in special education and how we can use this knowledge to select the most appropriate solutions for a person with special needs.

The area of special education has divided itself into roughly two camps, the traditionalists (Brantlinger, 1997) and the inclusionists. Each group claims to speak on behalf of the disabled person and to have the right descriptions and solutions for special education (e.g., Kaffmann & Sasso, 2006; Gallagher, 2006). According to researchers, traditionalism and inclusionism are incompatible, and their understanding of disabilities very different (Hausstätter, 2007; Brantlinger, 1997; Danforth, 2004; Vehmas, 2008). As part of this debate, several different theoretical descriptions have appeared over the last two decades in order to lay a foundation for the operationalization of the different understandings of special education (e.g., Skrtic, 1991; Skidmore, 1996; Emanuelsson, Persson & Rosenqvist, 2001; Haug, 2003; Hausstätter, 2004).

At the centre of this debate are the questions about the role of special education in today's school and society and whether disabilities are real and unchangeable or are socially constructed (e.g., Gallagher, 2001; Gallagher, Heshusius, Iano, & Skrtic, 2004; Kavale & Forsnes, 2000; Lipsy & Gardner, 1991; Mostert, Kavale & Kauffman, 2007; Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2008). This debate draws out the ethical challenges of education in general and special education in particular. The problem with this discussion, however, is that it seems to be ridden by traditionalist and inclusionist orthodoxies instead of being guided by pedagogical knowledge and ethics (Iano, 1990; Kavale & Mostert, 2004). This lack of pedagogical reflection results in a lack of a clear focus on the school and its obligation to prepare children for their adult years (Connolley & Hausstätter, 2009).

Much of the debate between traditionalism and inclusionism does not offer concrete solutions on how special education should be implemented. As emphasized by Hausstätter and Connolley (2007), a significant part of this debate should focus on the actual effects of special education in order to support or legitimize a given perspective. Yet it is challenging to identify what policies or measures are effective. Kavale and Mostert (2004) have noted that the field of special education is rife with examples of ideological and cultural positions that define the results of special education. Hausstätter and Connolley's (2007) solution has been to establish a framework for defining the goal for special education outside of the field of special education itself by presenting the Salamanca Statement as an example. Hegarty

(2001) has emphasized another possible goal of special education, namely, the core business of schooling: teaching young people to become responsible, productive members of society.

The core business of schooling forms the framework for the perspectives presented in this article. First, we shall present the theoretical framework that provides an understanding of the process of creating the special student in special education, which is aimed mainly for practitioners but can also be useful for researchers. Secondly; we shall show how this understanding can be helpful for identifying the appropriate means of educating and supporting the 'special' student. We claim that both traditionalism and inclusionism can offer important contributions to special education. The former has a well developed range of methodologies aimed at helping people with specific problems, and the latter has the emphasis on the social and ethical context of education.

The disabled as process

The distinction between impairments and disabilities is indispensable for emphasizing the role of education within special education (Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2008). Vehmas and Mäkelä (2008) have defined impairment in terms relating to physical properties: *[...] impairment is a class name for natural properties that, depending on the context, in part cause or constitute functional limitations – although the limiting implications of the property in question can in part be explained in social terms [...]. Thus, impairment is a physical or organic phenomenon whose identification and definition are determined culturally and socially; it is inevitably about attaching some meaning to individual properties* (p. 44).

Disability, on the other hand, incorporates the social effects of impairment: *Disability, however, is a relational phenomenon that consists in the relation between the natural properties or features on the one hand, and the surrounding social and physical world on the other. [...] What distinguishes disability from impairment is that it can become dissociated from people's physical conditions. Disability often involves very general social structures and mechanisms that cannot be reduced to people's physical or mental characteristics* (p. 44).

Vehmas and Mäkelä (2008) have described the connection between impairments and disabilities by drawing on John Searle's philosophical work on the distinction between 'brute' and 'institutional' facts. Brute facts are 'out there' and 'indifferent' (Hacking, 2002), and they are neither dependent on a social structure for their existence nor change if they are an essential part of a social structure. In contrast, institutional facts are dependent on a social structure and its mechanisms in order for them to have any meaning for us. The statement, 'Hans has one foot', is a description of a brute fact, but the statement 'Hans has only one foot' is an institutional fact; the first does not imply any institutional evaluation of the situation Hans finds himself in, but the adverb 'only' of the second statement underlines the discrepancy between what we regard as normal in our society and Hans's condition. Further, the statement, 'Hans is disabled', indicates an even greater institutionalization, for stating that someone is disabled might well lead to a change in this person's perception of herself or himself. According to Hacking, these kinds of classifications are interactive: *The inter may suggest the way in which the classification and the individual classified may interact, the way in which the actors may become self-aware as being classified in a certain way, if only because of being treated in institutionalized in a certain way, and so to experiencing themselves in that way* (Hacking, 2002 p. 11).

Schools are social institutions that employ a series of mechanisms in order to teach people to become responsible, productive members of society. In other words, pupils in schools act in a social context, and their ability to succeed is also judged according to this context, hence the *special need* for education presents itself when we compare people to others acting in the same social context. It is, however, important to bear in mind that even though disabilities are socially constructed, the disability in itself is no less real, as some would claim within the full-inclusion debate (e.g., Gallagher, 2001). Michel Foucault's works make it clear that we cannot deny the reality of our world, even if we admit that our world is socially constructed. Disabilities are thus real: feeling disabled is a real feeling and being a disabled person is a real way of being a person (Hacking, 2006). Furthermore, educating the disabled person is no less a real task and the goal of this kind of education must be to make this person more able, or less disabled, and more capable (Nussbaum, 2006). However, in the manner that inclusionism is critical to this reality, we can also be critical, not because we want to liberate all who are labelled disabled (Løvlie, 1992), but because we have an ethical responsibility to give everyone the same opportunities of schooling, work, safety, and other vital areas of one's life (cf. Salamanca Statement).

Disabilities are constructed, but, as pointed out by Hacking (1999), simply to say that something is constructed is close to saying nothing. There are several accounts of the constructed disabled person as a

product of our society, which are usually accompanied by arguments about how this is wrong and bad. The view of disabilities as a product is not, however, very helpful if we aim to understand and reduce the negative aspects of this construction and to increase the effectiveness of education. As Hacking (1999) emphasizes, it is also possible, and in this context necessary, to look at disabilities as a *process* whereby we look at how people become disabled in our society, or for our purposes, how we look at a child who is in need of special education. This approach means that we have to understand the actual process of construction, that is, the social mechanisms underlying statements of institutional facts.

The technology of normalization

We argue that a central mechanism in the process of constructing a child in need of special education is located in the *technology of normalization*. A person is disabled because she or he is not able to do something according to a standard that is defined as normal. Normality and normalization are well established techniques within special education (e.g., Askheim, 2003; Osburn, 1998). Even if what is normal has historically been constructed in different ways, what we look at and accept as normal has always been an important feature of this field of knowledge (Foucault, 2001; Simons & Masschelein, 2005; Danforth, 2009). Although there are various models for understanding normality (e.g., Holst, 1978), we hold that the current technology of normalization arises out from three areas of normality: *biological normality*, *statistical normality*, and *moral and social normality*.

Biological, statistical, and moral and social notions of normality are involved in the construction of the disabled human being. In a Foucauldian framework, these techniques are part of a process where disabilities within special education are translated into socially constructed reality (Foucault, 2003b; Hausstätter, 2007). This process of construction involves the presence of learning problems through standards of normality with the support of other social and institutionalized mechanisms (table 1).

Table 1. Different Groups of Normality

Type of normality	Standard	Important part of	Support from
Biological normality	Biological entities	Traditionalism	Medicine
Statistical normality	Normal distribution	Traditionalism	Psychology
Moral and social normality	Social norms and rules	Inclusionism	Ethics

Each of these groups of normality can process groups of people with learning disabilities. Yet it is important for the practitioners and researchers of special education to understand that these groups express different kinds of problems and have different pedagogical solutions according to the construction of the problem. This link between how we use different techniques to define normality and different learning problems is, therefore, important for our understanding about the process of constructing disabilities and how special education can help disabled pupils become more able.

Biologically induced disabilities

Biologically induced disabilities are closely connected to the concept of impairment and to the medical perspective in special education (Vehmas, 2004). Biological normality interprets the human being and her or his ability according to biological facts, such as the number of chromosomes, the use of two legs, being able to see or hear, and so on. The evaluation of this normality is absolute in the sense that the factors are analysed in relation to specific biological characteristics. One can, of course, have poor eyesight or a reduced ability to hear, but this evaluation is based on the brute fact that one cannot see or hear. Biological normality is thus one standard by which we can judge people and construct a number of disabilities in our society.

Nevertheless, the definition of a problem within the reference of biological normality requires caution because it can be all too easy to overlook the social context in which disabilities are experienced. As we have seen, the distinction between impairment and disability is important for understanding the technology of normalization. Impairment is a brute fact and is not dependent on a social system to exist. Blindness, deafness, and the lack of one leg are examples of impairments that present themselves through their contrast to biological normality. Regardless of these disabilities in light of biological normality, the social context in which they appear makes an enormous difference. A blind or a deaf person would have had problems with learning and living several thousand years ago, just like today, but such persons in most modern societies have greater opportunities to cope with these challenges. A mentally impaired child would perhaps not have survived two hundred years ago, and would likely have had fatal consequences. In modern societies, this is no longer the case. These problems are defined and supported

within the medical perspective as pathological, and special education has developed strategies to educate people with such problems.

It is important to note, however, that many problems that we today consider as medical are not necessarily included in pedagogical debates about education. As emphasized by Vehmas and Mäkelä (2008), the medical perspective crosses the line between impairments and disabilities by naming the problems and giving them an institutional reference, such as a diagnosis. Furthermore, many medical diagnoses within special education today are not necessarily part of the process of biologically induced learning problems. Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Asperger's syndrome, and Tourette's syndrome are medically defined problems, but these diagnoses depend heavily on institutional references and social mechanisms. Accordingly, we claim that such defined problems are not introduced into the process of creating the special-needs person in education by a biological frame of reference, but by another technology of normalization – the area of morality and social acceptance, to which we shall later turn.

Statistically induced disabilities

The field of special education has drawn much methodological support from quantitative approaches in psychology. Statistical measurements and the normal distribution are important mechanisms for identifying disabilities within this area. One well known example of the use of statistical normality is the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) score, where an individual score is related to a mean score of 100. The normal distribution curve, or bell curve, according to defined parameters, forms the basis for statistical normality. Unlike biological normality, statistical normality is not based on an absolute understanding of what is considered as normal for humans. Instead, statistical normality is relative to the population measured, to a given task, and to the scale of measurement. We can count the number of chromosomes in humans all over the world on the basis of one theory about the role of chromosomes, but we cannot formulate a universal reading test without taking into account cross-cultural differences and the challenges they present. Statistical normality is today used to identify learning problems in areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Most subject areas in schools can be arranged according to a statistical distribution in relation to variables such as age and gender. Even though statistical normality is culturally dependent, it is no less real. If it is normal, for instance, for a child in one country to manage to read at the age of seven, then it is not normal for a child not to be able to read at the age of nine. The normal distribution of reading abilities indicates that a nine-year-old child in this country is in need of special education because her or his ability to read falls below the standards presented by the normal distribution within this specific community. The statistical measurements of a given population thus play a critical role in the construction of individuals in need of special education. There may be, of course, biological reasons for a particular problem, but it is through the failure to meet certain standards of performance of such tasks as reading and writing that these problems come into existence.

Ethically and socially induced disabilities

The ethical component of special education is crucial, especially in relation to the debate between traditionalism and inclusionism. An ethical argument plays an important role in the establishment of inclusionism (Brantlinger, 2001; Danforth, 2004), and appears to be critical in the claims of superior morality: *Special education appears to have drawn such a line between us and them over the question of inclusion. As Shanker (1994) pointed out, Some full inclusionists talk as though they are in a battle pitting the forces of morality against the forces of immorality (Kavale & Forness, 2000 p. 280).* Traditionalists, of course, also engage in moral and ethical questions, and often accuse inclusionists of being driven more by a political stance than by scientific arguments (e.g., Mostert et al., 2007; Connolley & Hausstätter, 2009; Vehmas, 2008). This article does not seek to argue for either side, but instead aims to recognize the moral and ethical aspects that are integral to special education as a whole.

Moral judgement is essential for a sufficient understanding of special education because it is critical in the construction of the disabled person in society in general. Moral judgements are part of our social traditions and clearly influence how we judge people's behaviour. Further, moral normality is important for the construction of the disabled person. There is an intimate relation between disabilities and moral and social acceptance (Foucault, 2001; Kirkebæk, 1993; Thuen, 2002). Let us consider the statement by a physician made in the early twentieth century: *The social and economic burdens of uncomplicated feeble-mindedness are only too well known. The feeble-minded are a parasitic, predatory class, never capable of self-support or of managing their own affairs. The great majority ultimately become public charges in some form. They cause unutterable sorrow at home and are a menace and danger to the community. Feeble-minded women are almost invariably immoral and... usually become carriers of*

venereal disease or give birth to children who are as defective as themselves... Every feeble-minded person, especially the high-grade imbecile, is a potential criminal, needing only the proper environment and opportunity for the development and expression of his criminal tendencies. (Dr. Walter E. Fernald 1912, in Davies, 1959 p. 47-48)

While most of us do not accept these views today, we still judge whether a person is able or unable to follow certain rules and norms that we find morally acceptable within a social framework. If a person is not able to follow a given set of rules, she or he becomes a problem for the system presenting the rules (Hausstätter, 2006). If someone cannot abide by the rules laid down by schools, she or he can thus be constructed as a disabled person in need of special education. Beyond the school, such people might be defined as 'mad' and thence institutionalized, or as criminals and sent to prison (Foucault, 1979; 2003a). Moral and social normalization is, therefore, a fundamental important way that societies deal with the disabled person.

Likewise, conditions such as ADHD and Asperger's syndrome are brought into reality through moral and social normality. Those who have social and behavioural problems reveal their problems within a social context based on moral judgements. In other words, social and behavioural problems are induced according to social and moral norms of acceptable behaviour. As both Foucault (2001) and Hacking (1995b) have pointed out, social surroundings change according to time and place, and the ways in which these kinds of problems are induced do so as well. Again, it could be that problems that we today define as emotional and behavioural are rooted in biological differences between humans; however, it is in the social context whether a given behavioural pattern is judged as problematic or not.

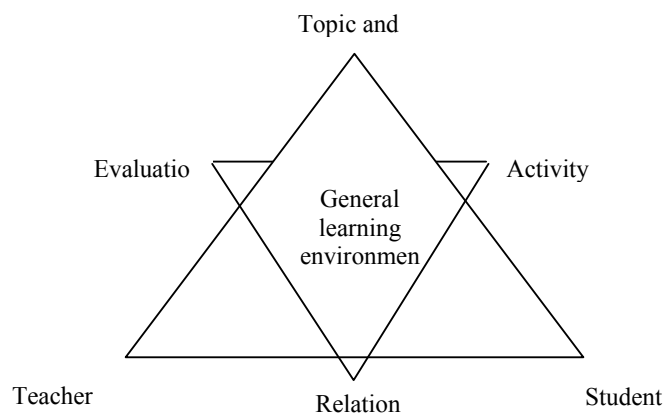


Figure 1. Aspects of Didactics (from Engelsen, 1990)

Focusing on Education

Both general and special educationalists must take into account the general principles of didactics. The general learning environment, the teacher's knowledge, the relation between the teacher and the student, and the evaluation of the educative process are aspects that seem to be universal in education (Engelsen, 1990) (figure 1). What is the 'special' for special education (in contrast to general education) is the student's situation, and the themes and goals for this kind of education might differ from those of general education?

We can employ the description of how different learning problems come into existence according to different standards of normality in order to understand better the situation that practitioners find themselves in when planning and implementing special education. To begin with, practitioners can draw from an understanding of the process whereby a person becomes identified as having a disability to describe different learning problems that the student might experience. This knowledge can then be used to organize different strategies within special education in relation to the *core business of education*. It is important to note, however, that this understanding changes because the context continually changes. There is, then, the need for the ongoing development of new strategies. Table 2 summarizes the framework presented here, which practitioners can use to operationalize existing strategies (table 2).

Table 2 gives examples of biologically induced learning problems that are closely connected to the existence of impairment, and lists various strategies that have been developed within special education to

meet these kinds of challenges. The main strategy for this group has been a focus on compensatory teaching and alternative learning goals. For example, a blind person can compensate by learning Braille and by using a guide dog, and a motor-impaired person can learn to drive a custom-built car. Through compensatory teaching, a student can learn how to use tools and alternative strategies in order to meet the general goals of education and thereby to be able to act as active citizens. In some cases the general learning goals require alterations, and the student may be offered an individualized educational plan. Severely mentally impaired students can, for example, have an educational plan that focuses on mastering some lower level of language competency and on learning to manage daily routines in order to lead a life that is as independent as possible.

Table 2: Types of Special Education According to Induced Problems

Normality	Examples of induced problems	Special education
Biological	Auditory problems Visual problems Speech problems Motor problems Asthma/allergy etc. Mental impairments	Compensatory teaching, i.e., learning to use equipment and alternative strategies in learning, e.g., wheelchair, guide dog, Braille, cochlear implant. Alternative learning goals for life-long learning, e.g., managing daily routines.
Statistical	Academic problems, e.g., problems with reading and writing, mathematics	Extra academic training. Individual support and alternative strategies towards learning. Technological support.
Moral and social	Social and behavioural problems	Social training and environmental changes.

Statistically induced learning problems do not necessarily lead to changes in the goals of education. Such learning problems can be overcome with extra academic training within the ordinary educational system or with extra pedagogical material or technological support. The 'pull-out' model where a small number of students receive extra support by special education outside of the normal classroom for a limited amount of time is used extensively by special education to teach students with academic problems. Another solution that seems to be developing is co-teaching, where special educational teachers take part in ordinary teaching as a way of supporting students with such problems. With respect to didactics (fig. 1), alternative activities are usually appropriate for statistically induced problems. However, in some cases, the academic challenges might be so severe that the time needed to learn academic skills far exceeds with time available at school, and consequently the goal of education requires some adjustment.

Social and behavioural problems come into existence through their departure from social norms, which are highly dependent on time and place. Time and place are, therefore, also important considerations when focusing on the education for students with such problems. Teaching students how to handle social regulations and rules is an established part of the special educational area. An important aspect of the theoretical framework for inclusion appears to be that the analysis and development of the general educational environment is critical for the identification of these problems (e.g., Overland, 2007). The acceptance that moral and social factors play an essential role for social and emotional problems entails an expansion of the role of special education. The augmented role that both schools and school policy in general play is thus also central to the special educational support for students with social and behavioural problems.

Summary

At first glance, one might read Table 2 as a normative understanding of the direction of special education. Moreover, real-world experiences are, of course, not so clear-cut as this table. Rather, the point of this classification is that it can help to clarify the relationship between the processes that construct disabilities within special education and the educational support that special education usually

offers. Further, the clarification of the different processes underlying the existence of various learning problems can guide the practitioner to plan and implement special education. We may also note that this framework combines certain aspects of traditionalism and inclusionism. An important point made by inclusionists is that the traditionalist approach often attributes the origin of the problem to the individual student, and that special education should concentrate efforts on the problem student (e.g., Gallagher, 2001). The inclusionist view rejects this practice because social and policy factors are essential for the existence of disabilities (e.g., Brantlinger, 1997; 2001; Smith & Gallagher, 2008). Similarly, this framework points to the difference between impairments and disabilities and how disabilities come to existence through different standards of normality. This distinction clearly acknowledges that disabilities are part of the social world, but are no less real for being so. Special education has to account for this fact, but this fact also implies that this field can and must work at different levels, both individually (i.e., the traditional view) and contextually (i.e., the inclusive view), but the focus on these levels might be dependent on what induces the problem and what special education can offer.

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